

Hempel Award
Philosophy of Science Association (PSA) 2024
James F. Woodward
November 16, 2024

It is a privilege to announce that the PSA’s newest recipient of the Hempel Award is Jim Woodward. This is an award that recognizes lifetime scholarly achievement in the philosophy of science. In these comments, I will speak to the excellence of his work, its profound influence on philosophical and scientific research, and his remarkable role as a mentor to myself and many other early career scholars in our field.

Jim is considered by many to be the epitome of a general philosopher of science—his work has (1) advanced our understanding of numerous foundational topics and general questions in philosophy, including those pertaining to causation, explanation, laws of nature, scientific theories, and many others. Additionally, (2) his work accomplishes this in a way that makes direct contact with a large number of scientific fields, where these include biology, neuroscience, cognitive science, medicine, physics, and economics. His work is incredible for many reasons, including its command of so many scientific domains and because it makes large advances in topics that have received significant attention in philosophy for decades and centuries, if not longer.

One area of work that Jim is particularly well-known for, is his influential account of causation and explanation—the interventionist account. This is detailed in his many papers and in his first book *Making Things Happen*, which won the Lakatos Award in 2005. This book provides a novel, principled, useful, and scientifically informed account of causation and causal explanation. This work has revolutionized the philosophical literature on causality, it is a common touchstone for philosophical projects that use causal notions but address other topics, and it has influenced scientific work in various ways, for example, by identifying causal distinctions that are later studied by cognitive scientists and shown to be important in human causal cognition. This last theme is explored in Jim’s recent book, *Causation with a Human Face*.

In addition to influencing how we understand causality, many philosophers also use his account as a tool to address a larger set of diverse questions on various topics. These include questions about laws of nature, natural kinds, modeling standards, types of causation and explanation, and evidence in science. In this manner, his work doesn’t just give a particular answer to a foundational topic, but instead it provides a framework and perspective that allows for further understanding along many dimensions.

And when philosophers comment on Jim’s first book (*Making Things Happen*), they do not hold back in their praise. This book has been cited as (1) “the single most influential book on causation written by a contemporary philosopher”, (2) “arguably the most important philosophical book about causation to appear in decades”, and (3) “arguably the most important book in the philosophy of science published in this century”. With this first book, and his most recent book *Causation with a Human Face*, and over 150 publications, it isn’t a surprise to hear people state that he has “revolutionized the philosophical discussion of causation”. These comments offer the highest-level praise, they are echoed throughout our field, and—importantly—none of them exaggerate.

While our field is well aware of the excellence of Jim’s work, something you might know less about is how exceptional he is as a mentor. Jim Woodward is a remarkably dedicated, supportive, kind, and thoughtful advisor and mentor. Among graduate students and early career scholars, he

is known for being available at a moment's notice, for being especially thoughtful and helpful in feedback on work, and for providing enduring support for students as they navigate the grueling challenges of graduate school, the job market, and early career work. Jim's approach with students is similar to how he interacts with colleagues and how he asks questions after philosophical talks—his questions focus on merits of the project, how it can be expanded and improved, and how he can use his knowledge base to be of assistance to the individual and their research. Jim builds up his students and his colleagues—he uses his time to better understand their work and help them as they develop and improve it.

What is just as impressive as his work is his extreme humility and respect for others—qualities that he has helped encourage in our profession through his demeanor and reflections on the field. Jim treats all colleagues with deep respect, he is genuinely open to learning from others and to criticism of his work, and—in a profession focused on argumentation—he is the paradigm of a discussant who is clear, reasoned, and collegial.

Being a student of Jim's is both an incredible privilege and also somewhat daunting. It is daunting because his work and his scholarly character set the bar unbelievably high—it is more than a challenge to aim for this high of a standard. Incredibly, he has shown us that it can be done, he supports the field's development in this direction, and he has provided a true model of a scholar to follow. In my view, too few have come close to Jim's level of research, role as a mentor, and capacity as a colleague. In large part because of him—many of us will try and the field will be better for our doing so.

Jim, congratulations and thank you. It is an enormous pleasure to know you, to learn from you, and to have you in our field.

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